

A Literature Review of Employment Program's Impact on Recidivism

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May 30, 2012

Baccalaureate Honors Thesis

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Abstract

This literature review considers the impact of employment programs on recidivism. There has been a dramatic rise in the numbers of those who have histories of incarceration in the United States. A review of the literature in this area of research reveals that many of the evaluations end with findings of “no statistical significance” concerning the effect of employment programs for ex-offenders on recidivism. This review concludes by suggesting that experimental and quasi experimental research may yield findings of greater impacts toward reducing recidivism and showing more instances of statistical significance. Specifically there is the need for the following: 1) Research on the impact of employment programs on recidivism needs to be conducted in fields with non-exclusionary hiring policies and hiring practices toward ex-offenders. 2) Employment programs offering financial assistance must be at a level that does not provide a disincentive to work. 3) Job placements offered by employment programs should be for work offering livable wages (not minimum wage). 4) Employment programs need to offer individualized treatment based on relevant variables such as age, marital status, race, risk level and length of incarceration. 5) Employment programs should offer a cognitive behavioral/thinking intervention as part of their services.

Problem Statement

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2011), there were over 1.6 million people incarcerated in federal and state prisons as of December of 2010 (Guerino, P., Paige M. Harrison, P. M., & Sabol, W. J., 2011). America leads the world in prison construction and imprisonment of its citizens (Wright, V., 2010, pg.1). Each year there are about 650,000 inmates that are released from incarceration, or 1,780 inmates a day (Kennedy, 2007, pg.1). One in 31 adults is either incarcerated, on probation, or on parole (PEW Center on the States, 2012, pg.1). There is an estimated 65 million adults who have criminal records (Emsellem, M., Rodriguez, M. N., 2011 pg.2). This equates to approximately 21% of the U.S. population, or 1 in every 4 to 5 adults.

Almost 70% of all former inmates who were released in 1994 committed a serious crime within at least three years of their release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). This study is the more recent of two studies that have thus far come closest to providing national recidivism rates. The highest rates of re-arrest were for crimes such as theft, burglary, possessing or selling illegal items (including drugs) or stolen property. These types of crimes, which all bare the commonality of being committed in order to provide income, accounted for 70-79% of the recidivism experienced (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

Employment has been identified as one of the leading concerns of those released from incarceration (Lattimore, P., & Visher, C., 2010, pgs.63-78). In addition, it has been repeatedly pointed out that employment is associated with reduced recidivism and increased effectiveness of employment program interventions (Martín, A. M., Hernández, B., Hernández-Fernaund, E., Arregui, J. L., & Hernández, J. A., 2010, pg.403). Still, many employers screen out ex-offenders during the application and hiring processes. Contained in the employment component to

recidivism rate reduction is the effect of paycheck deductions such as child support, fines, restitution, fees and surcharges that are court mandated for those with criminal backgrounds. Child support obligations will affect the approximately 744,200 fathers and 65,600 mothers who are incarcerated (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). A 76% increase in rates of incarceration among fathers and the 122% increase for mothers since 1991 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009) imply an increased impact on the need for securing viable employment for those released from incarceration.

In Florida incarceration carries an average cost of \$55.09 a day or \$20,108 annually per inmate (Florida Department of Corrections, 2009). In Ohio it costs \$68.01 per day to incarcerate an inmate (Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, 2010). This equates to \$24,823.65 a year per inmate. The average annual cost of incarceration in the United States: \$25,000-\$27,000 per inmate (Schmitt, j., Warner, K., & Gupta, S. 2010, pg.11). Government spending towards corrections costs the public about 52 billion dollars annually (PEW Center on the States, 2012, pg.1). This is one of the two most costly state budget items, second only to Medicaid (PEW Center on the States, 2012, pg.1). It is estimated by Pew Center that a 10% reduction in recidivism rates could produce an annual savings of \$635 million combined for the 41 states that responded to the Pew survey (PEW Center on the States, 2012, pg.26). As a crucial component to successful reentry and recidivism reduction, employment opportunities would not only facilitate these estimated savings, but also allow ex-offenders to become viable tax base contributors.

The effect of employment programs on recidivism will be considered in this literature review. The studies chosen for review have been limited to those which are:

- Experimental or quasi experimental

- containing a comparison group
 - conducted in or after 1972
- Involving adult men and adult women
 - age is addressed only to the extent that those over 26yrs old seem to have the lowest recidivism in many of the studies
- Excluding information concerning juveniles and issues of mental and physical disability
- Addressing employment programs and recidivism in the USA

This literature review of research conducted in the United States which considers recidivism among men and women, age 18 and over, is limited due to the resources available in carrying out this project. Specifically, there was a lack of and manpower needed to conduct more exhaustive research of the studies concerning this topic. Secondly, time constraints set forth by the Ohio State Undergraduate Honors Thesis program limited the amount of information that could be reviewed. This review was limited to only experimental and quasi experimental studies in an effort to more clearly show the impacts of the treatment administered to participants in employment programs as compared to those who received no treatment. Finally, these limitations were set forth as part of an effort to narrow the focus and scope of the literature review to clearly communicate extant questions, gaps in research and literature and areas for future study.

The literature and studies used in this review were retrieved from various databases to include; socIDEX with Full Text, Academic Search Complete, Criminal Justice Abstracts, psycCRITIQUES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Social Science Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, and Sociological Collection using the EBSCOHOST research database

service. Other resources also include; the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, and the International Data Resource Center which is from the University of Michigan's Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research.

Theoretic Frameworks

The Social Ecological Systems theory supports the idea that the experiences of ex-offenders and available work opportunities for ex-offenders may have an impact on whether or not they might re-offend. The Social Ecological Systems Model divides the environment into four dimensions or systems; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Ashford, J., & LeCroy, C., 2010 pgs. 134 & 135). The behavior and success of the individual depends on how they are impacted by each dimension or system within the overall environment. Each system or dimension affects the other. This model asserts that social elements and the environment are interrelated. An individual may be more fully understood in the context of their interrelation with, between and in different spheres of their environment and the way these spheres or systems (Micro-sphere, Meso-sphere, Exo-sphere and Macro-sphere) interrelate bi-directionally within and between each other. This theory considers the person, situation, system and environment (Ashford, J., & LeCroy, C., 2010 pg. 134). Changes at these levels influence the success and growth of the individual which in-turn shapes and affects the environment. For example, implementing policy changes concerning sanctions at the exo-sphere level or increasing employment opportunities at the meso-sphere level could foster successful re-entry. These changes may positively affect the environment by promoting changes such as a decrease in parent absenteeism, reduced recidivism rates and enabling ex-offender employment to strengthen the tax base. Job placement assistance, education, training and monetary support would seem to have similar positive effects on an individual (micro-

level) and his or her interactions and exchanges at other systematic levels. On the other hand, an increase in violent crimes at micro and meso-sphere levels may impact the environment in such a way as to cause change at the exo-sphere and macro-sphere levels such as; changes in policies and laws that provide harsher punishments in order to provide a disincentive for violent crime commission.

The Social Control Theory is another theoretic framework that research uses to explain the mechanisms by which employment acts to deter illegal activities. This theory proposes that primacy given to relationships, commitments, perceived acceptance within institutions (work, family, school, etc.) and perceived norms can be fostered in everyday activities (Pratt, T., Travis, F., & Gau, J., 2011, pg.58 & 59). The informal mechanisms (or controls) to foster this primacy are already in place in certain environments. One such environment is the workplace.

In the Social Control theory, there are four social bonds that foster the primacy that serves to motivate prosocial behaviors. The first social bond is *Attachment*. This implies unwillingness to damage, relinquish or jeopardize attained ***psychological affection*** (Pratt, T., Travis, F., & Gau, J., 2011, pg.58). This social bond might lead someone to say something like; “What will my children think of me when they found out?” or “What would my church think of me?” and “This’ll break my grandma’s heart.” The second social bond is *Commitment*. This implies unwillingness to damage, relinquish or jeopardize attained ***social relationships***. For example; “People might refrain from engaging in deviant activities that may threaten their employment or marriage” (Pratt, T., Travis, F., & Gau, J., 2011, pg.58). Thirdly, *Involvement* has to do with time that is spent carrying out prosocial activities. In short; a person who works eight to ten hours a day is, ideally, not spending those same hours engaging in criminal or deviant behaviors. So, a whole day spent engaged in legal activities means that the same person has not

spent those same hours breaking the law (Pratt, T., Travis, F., & Gau, J., 2011, pg.58). Lastly, *Belief* has to do with how closely one relates to and values the same behaviors which correlate to conformity to the established law. If a person honestly believes that illegal drugs are bad, they are less likely to engage in activities that may lead to the activity of illegal drug use. In this case, a person is less likely to even place themselves in environments that are permissive of this behavior also (Pratt, T., Travis, F., & Gau, J., 2011, pg.59).

So according to this theory, these social bonds (or social controls) are naturally available and informally in place in the work environment. Being employed organizes daily behaviors (involvement) and fosters attachment through the formation of new psychological bonds (co-workers, friends) of affection while strengthening those already established (pride and praise from family and friends). Employment also provides an arena that naturally implements commitment as a social control through the unwanted loss of employment due to involvement in illegal activities.

Background

Despite the logic of theoretic frameworks and a widely accepted belief that employment is a major component to successful reentry after incarceration and recidivism reduction, the majority of the research, literature and studies in this area show little to no statistical significance concerning the effect of employment programs on recidivism. While the basis for this trend is not fully understood one meta-analysis attributes this phenomenon to “the generally weak methodological character of these studies” (Wilson, D., Gallagher, C., & Mackenzie, D., 2000, pg.364). There are also issues concerning selection that are difficult for these type of studies to guard against because of the criteria for program placement may differ between the researchers conducting the evaluation and the prison institutional regulations. For example; a sex offender

may meet the research criteria for participation in a work release program under evaluation, but may have been assigned to a cognitive behavioral treatment group as a matter of institutional policy. In this case, the institutional rules must be followed to ensure public safety. If these types of offenders are excluded from participation and selection for certain pre and post-release employment programs, the comparative recidivism rates of comparison groups and treatment groups might not thoroughly represent the recidivism between groups because certain categories of ex-offenders may be underrepresented. Members of control groups may have had contact and/or minimal participation in certain work programs under evaluation for periods that are not sufficient to the observed program. This would result in a contaminated comparison group and effectively decrease the effect of the treatment administered through program participation since this same treatment effect may be present among control group members (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504).

Some of the earliest studies examining the impact of employment programs on recidivism rates date back to the 1970's. The time span between 1970 and 2000 the "tough on crime movement" emphasized punishment and incarceration over therapeutic, educational/vocational and other programs as methods of crime rate and recidivism reduction. This movement gave birth to such policies and enactments as the "Three Strikes" provision applied to felonious convictions which made it possible for those who were charged with three felonies to be sentenced to life terms of incarceration. Mandatory minimum sentencing and other sentencing practices as part of the nation's "War on Drugs" led to increased levels and lengths of incarceration. The United States' incarcerated population rose from a combined prison and jail population of about 330,000 in 1972 (Mauer, M., 2004, Pg.2) to 910,080 in 1993 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1970-1993). The nation's rate of incarceration rose from about 300 per every

100,000 people to 715 per 100,000 from the beginning of this period until now, “placing the United States comfortably in the world lead in this regard, with a rate 5-8 times that of most other industrialized nations” (Mauer, M., 2004, Pg.3).

This literature review will consider eight studies which include the Baltimore Living Insurance for Ex-offenders (LIFE) experiment, the Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP), the National Supported Work Demonstration, Job Training for Probationers (JTP), Study of Ohio Prison Jobs, Opportunity to Succeed, the Ohio Penal Industries (OPI) Evaluation, and Project Re-Integration of Offenders (Project RIO).

The background variables generally used to statistically significantly match treatment to control groups in the research contained in literature and in the studies included in this essay are age, race, marital status, gender, employment status, police/ arrest record, length of incarceration, type and level of offense, education, socio economic status, race, alcohol and drug use.

Baltimore LIFE Experiment

The Living Insurance for Ex-offenders (LIFE) experiment conducted in Baltimore Maryland during the fiscal years of 1972 through 1974 intended to reduce recidivism by providing financial assistance and job-placement assistance to recently released prisoners. This controlled experiment was launched with the intent of it being a pilot to a follow-up experiment. The LIFE experiment was sponsored by the Employment and Training Administration of the United States Department of Labor (Maller, D. C., Thornton, C., 1978, pg.210).

The eligibility criteria for participation in the LIFE program resulted in a target population containing members who planned on returning to the Baltimore metropolitan area. Participants also had a high probability of committing theft crimes. None of the study

participants had a known history of alcohol or narcotic abuse. All who were part of this study were under the age of 45 and had less than \$400 worth of savings. All participants had committed more than one offense. At least one of the committed offenses was a property crime. No participant had been on work release for more than three months (Maller, D. C., Thornton, C., 1978, pg.211)

The sample of ex-offenders consisted of 432 male inmates released from Maryland's state prisons. The men were then randomly assigned to four different treatment groups. The first treatment group received \$60 a week for a period of three months and job placement services for a year post release. The second group received \$60 a week for a three month period as their only treatment. If a study participant receiving weekly payments obtained earnings during the first three months of the experiment, the weekly payments were reduced by less than half of the earnings obtained. The third group was given only job placement services as their treatment. The fourth group was not given any treatment at all and served as the control group.

Background information was gathered concerning the participants through the use of court records in order to obtain arrest information. Participants were interviewed prior to their release for baseline data. Interviews were also conducted each month post-release in order to update data on the current activities and socioeconomic status of the participants. The data collected showed that participants had only attained low levels of education and came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants also possessed a high number of previous arrests. For example, only 51 participants had completed high school and 246 out of the 432 men held jobs for over a year. Thirty-eight (9%) out of the 432 participants had been arrested fewer than three times (Maller, D. C., Thornton, C., 1978, pg.212).

In the results of initial and secondary comparisons of the mean recidivism rates of the control and experimental groups, there was found to be a reduction in recidivism from those receiving financial aid. The job placement treatment was not found to be effective in reducing recidivism. In fact, even after the secondary measurements which involved adjusting the sample means differences using regression techniques, the job placement assistance treatment was still found to be ineffective. In addition to this, the men who received job placement assistance were actually more likely to recidivate in findings of the secondary measurement calculations.

One limitation mentioned in literature concerning the LIFE experiment is that the sample was made up of a very carefully selected group of high-risk ex-offenders within one city (Maller, D. C., Thornton, C., 1978, pg.234). Those conducting the experiment hoped that this type of sample would provide a larger and more dramatic reduction in recidivism. This more dramatic reduction would be easier to see and measure than the recidivism among a more general population of ex-offenders in which there would be less probability of recidivism. Another limitation is that this experiment only examined its effects in one economic condition and labor market, that of Baltimore Maryland (in 1972-1974). There is also a need for an examination of the long-term effects of the program “with respect to data on time paths of arrests, earnings and welfare participation differentials” (Maller, D. C., Thornton, C., 1978, pg.234).

TARP Experiment

The proceeding experiment to LIFE study was the Transitional Aid Research Project (TARP). This study attempted to address some of the limitations of the LIFE pilot experiment. Georgia and Texas were the fields for this experiment. The experiment was conducted between 1976 and 1977. The idea of this study was the same as the LIFE study; to lower incentives to commit crimes and thereby reduce recidivism among the study participants receiving treatment.

The treatment in this experiment took the form of job placement assistance and money. Ex-offenders were eligible anywhere from 13 to 26 weeks' worth of financial support. Georgia participants could receive \$70 a week and Texas participants could receive \$63 a week. "The job placement treatment consisted of special counseling efforts and up to \$100 worth of grants for the purchase of tools, special work clothes, and other work related expenses" (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.769).

The sample for the TARP experiment was made up of about 2000 participants from Georgia and 2000 participants from Texas, all of whom were ex-offenders. These participants generally possessed low educational attainment came from poor socioeconomic backgrounds, sharing meager earnings and sparse employment histories. There were very few participants who would be considered middle-class, based on earnings and education (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.770). The participants were randomly assigned to one of six groups. Group one received financial assistance for 26 weeks. Group number two received financial assistance for 13 weeks with assistance reduced at a rate of 100cents off of each dollar (tax rate of 100%) earned after obtaining employment. Group number three was given financial assistance for 13 weeks also but with assistance reduced at a rate of 25 cents off of each dollar (tax rate of 25%) earned after obtaining employment. Group number four received treatment in the form of job placement assistance only. The fifth and sixth groups were used as control groups.

A control group was interviewed and monitored post-release; the second control group was not monitored post-release and data was subsequently gathered for this group using administrative records. There is no employment data available concerning this group. For this reason, the second control group is not considered in data analysis for the experiment (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.768). Unlike the LIFE experiment (with only male

participants) to which this study was a follow-up to, this experiment contained both men and women participants.

The findings from this study show no statistically significant impact on arrests for participants (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.777). Still, there was a reduction in the amount of property and non-property for those who received treatment when compared to those who had no treatment. The reduction for arrests in Georgia was 10% for every \$100 given in financial assistance to participants. Those program participants in Georgia who were employed full time for a 12 month period were arrested one less time than control group members within the same timeframe (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.781). In Texas the reduction in arrests was 20% for every \$100 given to participants. The program participants receiving treatment in Texas who were employed full time for a year were arrested 1.5 times less than control group members within the same timeframe (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.781).

Secondly, the experiment findings revealed a reduced effort on the part of participants in finding legal employment. The payments given as part of the treatment seemed to provide a disincentive for obtaining employment in some cases. There was a reduction of two-thirds of a week in the amount of time worked in relation to every 100 dollars of financial aid given to participants (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.778). So, these results seem to indicate that ...“modest amounts of financial assistance can reduce recidivism among ex-felons” and “experimentally induced unemployment can increase recidivism” (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.784).

As stated earlier, one limitation of the TARP study is that there were very few middle income participants. The financial aid received as treatment served as an incentive for gaining

legal employment while also creating completion to finding employment among some recipients. Researchers explain this phenomenon by stating that “wages of between \$100 and \$150 per week before taxes earned at hard and/or unpleasant tasks can hardly appear to be extraordinarily appealing, compared to \$60 or \$73 per week obtained without working” (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.784). The researchers of this study considered variable of incarceration to be highly related to recidivism and unemployment in this experiment despite the findings concerning the treatment impacts on recidivism.

The National Supported Work Demonstration

The National Supported Work Demonstration study funded by the United States Department of Labor was conducted between 1975 and 1977. There were over 3000 participants in this study. The sample of ex-offenders was drawn from nine U.S cities: Jersey City, Atlanta, Hartford, Newark, San Francisco, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Oakland (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 533). The participants had to be unemployed and could have been employed for no longer than three months through 1975 and 1977 (Visser, C, Winterfield, L., & Coggeshall, M., B., 2005, pg. 301). Participants also had to have been incarcerated for six months prior to program enrollment in order to qualify (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 532). Much like previous experiment, the sample consisted of ex-offenders who were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, had employment histories with low levels of employment and “chronic” unemployment (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 532). This experiment also targeted “hardcore drug users” (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 532). Study participants were mostly male and consisted of juvenile offenders as well as adult offenders. The treatment group was offered minimum wage employment in crews of 8 to 10 workers led by counselor/supervisors (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 532).

The first analysis of this experiment showed no significant impact on recidivism of the participants. During the first year of the study 69% of both the treatment and control group members younger than 26 years of age had not been rearrested. This percentage changed to 55% and 54% respectively for control group and treatment group non-arrests (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 537). However, a second analysis of the study findings revealed that this “program that originally was deemed a failure was found to significantly reduce recidivism among ex-offenders over the age of 26” (Visser, C., Winterfield, L., & Coggeshall, M., B 2005, pg. 302). There was 30% recidivism in the treatment group and 40% recidivism in the control group (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 537). The findings of variations in the success of the program according to the age of participants was a helpful and promising revelation given the disappointing history of employment programs up until that point (1977) in history.

One of the limitations of this particular experiment was the reliance on self-reporting for some of data collected. Illegal earnings were one piece of data collected using self-reports from participants. However, Uggen (2000) points out that these self-reports may represent less serious offenses that might have gone unnoticed by the criminal justice system (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 539). “For example, whereas selling a small amount of marijuana to a close friend may generate illegal earnings, selling drugs on a street corner is more likely to result in arrest” (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 539).

Job Training for Probationers

Over the course of three years (1979, 1980 and 1981), 108 job training program participants were compared to 108 non-program participants in order to evaluate the impact of the program on recidivism (Anderson, D., & Schumacker, R., 1986, pg. 18. This program offered resume building, mock interviewing and some skills training as a treatment.

Study participants were divided into cohorts of 36 participants for each year and 36 non-participants each year (Anderson, D., &Schumacker, R., 1986, pg. 18). The subjects ages ranged from 18-25, all participants were male had attained low socioeconomic financial status.

Recidivism was characterized as a return to jail or prison within a 6 to 12 month period. The treatment groups showed fewer instances of recidivism and probation revocations (15.5%) as compared to the control group (23%). However, this was not found to be a statistically significant outcome (Anderson, D., &Schumacker, R., 1986, pg. 19).

Some limitations of this study included statistically significant differences between the treatment and control groups such as; age, employment status, and offense class and type. The mean age for the control group was 21.1 years of age. The mean age of the treatment group was 20.5 years of age. This may mean that if the control and treatment groups had been more equally matched the outcome would have revealed statistical significance.

Study of Ohio Prison's Job Programs

A study conducted by the Loyola College in Maryland looked at a data set of 4,515 male prisoners released between the years of 1992 and 2002. Criterion for inclusion in this study included that participants had been incarcerated for at least one year in order to have benefited from work or education programs (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 503). All of the participants were from Ohio state prisons. The program analyzed the recidivism of participants from three different prison programs: Ohio Prison Industry Jobs (OPI for short), Non-OPI jobs (cafeteria, library, commissary, etc.), and education programs (GED, Adult Basic Education (ABE), vocational, etc.) (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504).

The results of this study showed that the participation in at least one of the three programs looked at, “dramatically” impacted recidivism for those receiving treatments (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504). However, the impact of program participation seemed to erode over time. The 9% of the subjects who did not participated in any programs, recidivated at higher and faster rates than those who had participated in the programs (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504). The study results revealed “30.4–35% of prisoners participating in prison industry, educational or prison job programmes recidivated within the first 3 years, and 46–50.6% did so within 10 years. (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504)” While those who were not involved in any programs returned to prison at the following percentages: “Within three years, 64.8% returned, and within 10 years, 73.7% did so. (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 504)”

Researchers in this study state that they were unable to identify the separate effects the human capital effect and labor market signaling. Sedgley (2008) explains these two phenomenon in this way, “Once a former prisoner is hired, participation in prison program[me]s may have increased their skills and work habits, making participants more successful employees and increasing their job duration after hire (human capital effect)” (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pg. 501). “Prisoners might use the program[me]s as a means of signaling to potential employers that they possess these favo[u]rable attributes (labo[u]r market signaling)” (Sedgley, N., Scott, C., William, N., & Derrick, F., 2008, pgs. 500-501). The researchers of this particular study also did not attempt to account for or seek data concerning convictions or incarcerations across state lines. Of course, this sample consisted of participants that were available and had been assigned to programs, prior to the evaluations, by prison industry professionals. Criterion for program participation may have effected random assignment. For

example, OPI participants may have been required to have a certain level of reading proficiency due to the nature of some of the jobs offered by the program. There was a limit to how participant characteristics and group sizes could be matched because of prison policies concerning program (treatment administration) placement and non-placement.

Opportunity to Succeed

The Opportunity to Succeed study randomly assigned a sample of 398, mostly male (85%), participants were 17-55 years old (Rossman, S., Sridharan, S., Gouvis, C., Buck, J., & Morley, E., 1999, pg. 2). This experiment was conducted in three cities (Kansas City, St. Louis, and Tampa). The program and study spanned 3 years beginning in 1994. Services (treatment) were available to program participant for two years. As treatment, the program offered participants job readiness, and training classes. Substance abuse treatment, health services, family strengthening services and housing were other services offered by the program (Rossman, S., Sridharan, S., Gouvis, C., Buck, J., & Morley, E., 1999, pg. 2). Data for this evaluation was gathered through self-reports and official records. The program also offered job placement, counseling, therapeutic interventions and case management that included needs assessments and service referrals.

The evaluation showed that there was minimal statistical significance between treatment and control groups. The study participants enrolled in the program recidivated at lower rates but statistical significance was only reached at a 0.10 level (Rossman, S., Sridharan, S., Gouvis, C., Buck, J., & Morley, E., 1999, pg. 4).

Ohio Penal Industries Evaluation

In 1997 another study began to evaluate the impact of having an Ohio Penal Industries job on the post-release recidivism of ex-offenders. Recidivism was defined as returning to the

Ohio Prison system within five years from release (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 43). Unlike the previous study, this experiment only looked at Ohio Penal Industry (OPI) jobs. Non-OPI jobs and educational/vocational programs were not considered.

Data for this study was gathered from two main sources; the Department Offender Tracking System (DOTS) and the Training, Industry and Education (TIE) database (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 43). The data was used to put together a treatment group that consisted of 705 ex-offenders and a comparison group of 697 members (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 45).

Members of the treatment group had to have participated in OPI for at least 90 days in order for them to have what was considered “meaningful” participation (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 43). While the large majority of participants and subjects were males, females were also included in this evaluation. About 97% of the comparison group were men and 96% of the treatment group were men (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 46).

The findings from this study show that the differences between the groups, concerning recidivism, were not statistically significant “leading to the conclusion that participation in an OPI job while incarcerated had no appreciable effect upon an inmate’s recidivism rate for the group as a whole” (Konicek, P., 2004, pg. 45).

Project Re-Integration of Offenders (Project RIO)

Project Re-Integration of Offenders (RIO) is another program designed to reduce recidivism offered through the Texas Workforce Commission. The evaluation of this project was performed by the Texas Workforce Commission between the years of 2000 and 2005. The study included approximately 60,000 participants who were released from incarceration between 2000 and 2001 (State Auditor’s Office, 2007, pg. 44). Treatment for participants was given in the form of mock interviewing, resume building, job placement assistance, anger management, civic

responsibility teaching and parenting skills training. Data concerning participants was gathered by the Texas Workforce Commission from the Department of Criminal Justice. The data was separated into four cohorts. The first cohort contained offenders who received services after their release (Post-release RIO). The second cohort of offenders received services before and after their release (Pre-Post release RIO). Members of the third cohort received services before their release (Pre-release RIO). Lastly, offenders who did not receive any services were designated as the Non-RIO group (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 44).

The findings from the study show “dramatically” lower rates of recidivism for program participants than for non-participants (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 44). The results also show higher rates of employment for program participants (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 44). “The employment rate for the Pre-Post RIO cohort is approximately twice that of the Non-RIO cohort for one, three, and five years post-release. (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 44)” In 2001 the recidivism rates for pre-post, post release and pre-release RIO programs were respectively; 2.1%, 7.6%, and 4.6%. (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 45). Non-RIO subjects had a recidivism rate of 10.3% for the same year (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 45). The rates of recidivism for 2003 were as follows; Post-release RIO (11.7%), Pre-post RIO (6%), Pre-release RIO (9.4%) and non-RIO (25.4%) (State Auditor's Office, 2007, pg. 45).

Implications

With regard to the research involving offering financial assistance to ex-offenders in order to aid them in their transition from incarceration to free society; the literature and studies have shown that only modest amounts are beneficial for statistically significant recidivism reduction (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.784). Given the low wage (often minimum wage) work available to recently release ex-offenders, financial assistance may serve

to be competition to the incentive for gaining legal employment. In essence, why find physically taxing and strenuous labor that only offers minimum wage when one can acquire the same wages for 6-12 months without unpleasant tasks, strenuous labor and long work hours (Berk, R., Lennihan, K., & Rossi, P., 1980, pg.784)? So, perhaps the range of modesty for financial assistance would be somewhere above the \$75 given to prisoners upon their release from incarceration and below minimum wage (Harrison, B., & Schehr, R., 2004, pg. 59). An experimental study involving ex-offenders receiving different kinds and amounts of financial assistance as part of treatment measures could be very informative in the search for effective interventions.

Effectively assisting ex-offenders may have less to do with the amount of cash offered and more to do with the reductions in the fines, fees, restitutions and other debt an ex-offender may be ordered to be pay. An ex-offender who is a non-custodial parent may have up to 65% percent of his or her earnings deducted due to arrear accrued while incarcerated (McLean, R., & Thompson, M., 2007, p.22). In addition, the payment of fines fees and restitution may be mandated (up to 35% of take home pay) (McLean, R., & Thompson, M., 2007, pg. 8). These paycheck deductions may add to the disincentive to find legal employment. This is an area that was not addressed in the literature using quasi experimental and experimental methods of research contained in this essay.

Once again, this implies that an exo-sphere level intervention is needed to create policy change. This may add a compounding positive effect to any financial assistance offered in employment programs for those recently released from prisons. The Justice Center outlines reforms such as: lowering the cap (from 35% to 20%) for fines, fees, surcharges and restitution along with modifying child support orders while the parent is incarcerated in their 2007 report

(McLean, R., & Thompson, M., 2007, p.22). Once these policies are in place, further research can be done to examine the impact of this component (financial assistance) of employment programs for ex-offenders.

The National Supported Work Demonstration experiment revealed variations in the success of the program according to the age of participants. This finding agrees with the idea that age is an important determining variable concerning ex-offender reintegration, ex-offender employment and recidivism (Harrison, B., & Schehr, R., 2004, pg. 42). In this case, a program like the National Supported Work Demonstration may be one intervention applied to a person who is in the age range beginning at 26 and older. For those younger than 26 years of age, perhaps high recidivism rates have more to do with impulsivity and opportunity in conjunction with a lack of employment (Uggen, C., 2000, pg. 531). If this is the case, intense cognitive behavioral interventions might be applied along with job placement. For this younger demographic, more intense follow-up and frequent monitoring may be needed to further lessen recidivism. These interventions may not be as necessary for ex-offenders aged 26 and older (Harrison, B., & Schehr, R., 2004, pg. 55).

With the majority of literature seeming to indicate that the relationship between employment programming and the recidivism of ex-offenders is largely not statistically significant, one wonders if the programs themselves are ineffective or if the relationship between work and recidivism is overestimated. Not that there is no relationship between work and recidivism but that perhaps the compounding effects of work, sustainable wages, available opportunities and changes in attitudes toward criminal behaviors may be needed to note statistically significant effects from the majority of future research and literature concerning employment, employment programs and the recidivism of ex-offenders. In light of this, future

studies should include employment programs that pre-post assess the attitudes of its participants, offers cognitive behavioral treatment and provides job placement to work offering sustainable wages. In addition to these things, the sample size of the study should be large enough to eliminate questions (or at least diminish concerns) of validity. Ideally this would all take place in a labor market that offers more available opportunities to ex-offenders. Unfortunately this is, by large, not the case.

The study might be fielded in an urban city and (much like the Baltimore LIFE experiment) should have an anticipated follow-up experiment to address any limitations. Perhaps the largely consistent findings of no statistical significance concerning the impact of employment programs on recidivism should be expected if the fields in which the experimental and quasi experimental evaluations are conducted do offer opportunities to actually utilize the tools offered through the program treatments. In essence, one could be taught to fish, supplied with a fishing pole and with bait. However, the items and education would be of little use if a military troop prevented access to the lake in which the fish dwell. This may be the case with current reentry employment programs. The tools provided may be relevant and beneficial, but useless in a labor market setting that shuts those with criminal backgrounds out of the entire hiring process.

This last idea of providing available opportunities is a subject of much advocacy. The National Employment Law Project (NELP) issued a report that stated that; “an estimated 65 million U.S. adults who have criminal records often confront barriers that prevent even the most qualified from securing employment. (Emsellem & Rodriguez, 2011, p.3)” Many job advertisements for employment exclude ex-felons from consideration with statements such as; “applicants must have a clean background” (Emsellem & Rodriguez, 2011, p.2). Still, state and federal governments are implementing plans for reentry initiatives that address hiring practices

towards ex-offenders, including employment for city jobs (Emsellem&Rodriguez, 2011, p.21).

So, it seems that this last element of having available opportunities is in-the making.

Conclusion

Existing literature shows inconsistent findings that range from mostly no statistical significance to minimal statistical significance. However, recent literature may provide research showing more instances of statistical significance. This may be due to a change in policies and hiring practices implemented within the fields and labor markets that the research is conducted in as policy makers, reentry professional and employers are becoming more aware and sensitive to issues concerning recidivism and ex-offenders.

Evaluations resulting in findings showing no statistical significance and minimal significance may possibly be attributed to labor markets that historically marginalize ex-offenders in hiring practices. Future research should include an assessment of the field (city labor market) in which the research will be conducted. Classifying the field according to amount of progressive policies concerning hiring practices of those with criminal backgrounds would help to show how exclusionary and non-exclusionary hiring practices impact the effectiveness of employment program treatment. A sample size large enough and diverse enough to represent common demographics of those incarcerated in the United States and to show that any reduction in the rates of recidivism among participants receiving treatment is not the result of mere chance. Of course, this is part of what it means to have results from an evaluation are found to be statistically significant. The program under evaluation should also offer an assessment of what will qualify as sustainable wages for clients receiving job placement as a treatment intervention. Financial assistance offered as treatment should be evaluated so it does not act as competition for obtaining legal employment to program participants. Individualized treatment based on relevant

variables such as age, length of incarceration, race and risk levels of those participants receiving treatment. The programs offered and evaluated should contain cognitive behavioral treatment component. In addition to these things, continued and increased advocacy is needed in order to promote changes in policies and hiring practices that exclude ex-offenders from employment. Ideally this research might take place in an urban city as opposed to a rural area. Perhaps if these strategies are implemented and particular attention is given to the labor market hiring practices and policies within the city that the research is fielded, findings may include more instances of statistical significance along with lower rates of recidivism for ex-offenders.

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